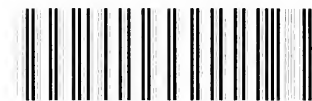


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DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORY
OF THE
OLD BLAKE HOUSE
AND A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE
DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY
JAMES H. STARK
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OLD BLAKE HOUSE
COLUMBIA ROAD
DORCHESTER, MASS.

Open Tuesdays and Saturdays, 2 to 5 P.M.

JANUARY 1, 1907

DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HISTORY OF THE OLD BLAKE HOUSE

BY JAMES H. STARK,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE DORCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

On April 6, 1891, William H. Whitmore, City Registrar, and Mr. James H. Stark obtained a special act of the legislature incorporating the Dorchester Historical Society. This society succeeded the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, which was organized on Jan. 27, 1843; but at the organizing of the new society its membership had been reduced to but three members, namely: Edmund J. Baker, President; Henry G. Denny, Secretary; and William B. Trask, Curator.

The new society started with a membership of twenty-five. Since then many of the most well-known and influential men of the old town have become members.

Among the results of the society's work may be mentioned the observance of the 274th anniversary of the settlement of Dorchester and the inauguration of Dorchester Day, which is now a fixture, and under the auspices of the society the anniversary is observed yearly, and is practically a "Home Coming" for the residents of old Dorchester that are scattered throughout the land. Business houses and private residences are elaborately decorated. There are parades, addresses, regattas, ringing of bells, fireworks, etc.

The principal purpose of the society is to collect, preserve, and publish information concerning the ancient town of Dorchester.

The activity and industry of its members since its incorporation have contributed much to the general interest in Colonial and Revolutionary annals, and many scenes of national historic importance before unheeded and almost unknown have become through research and publication familiar.

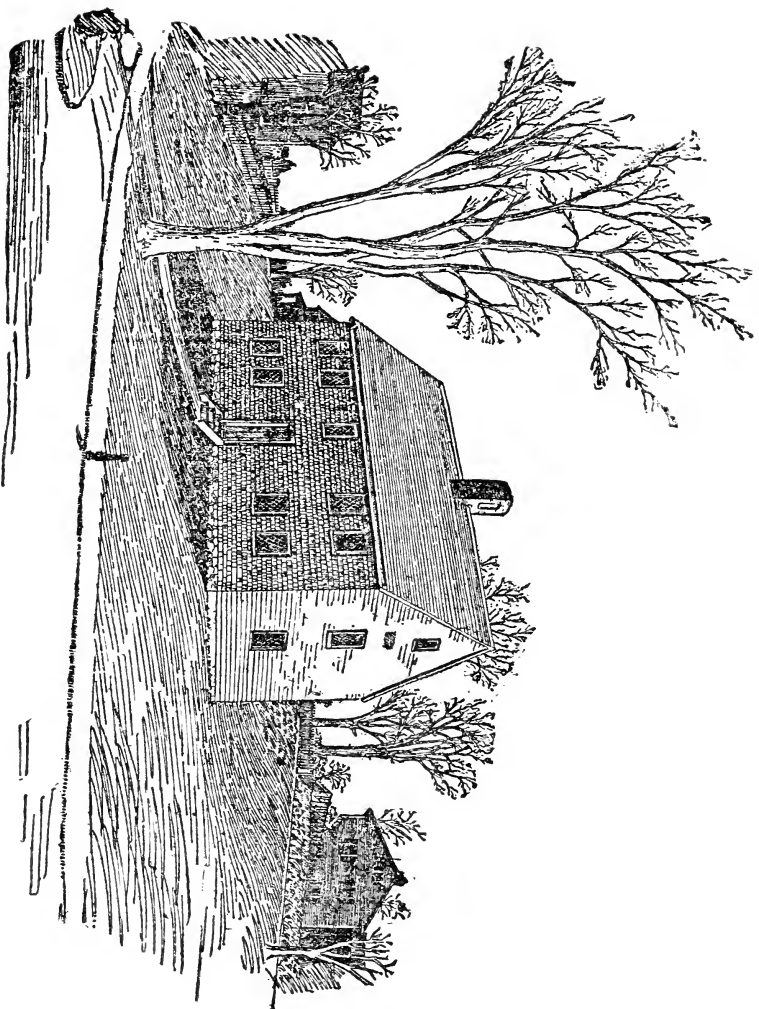
Among the results of the society's work may be mentioned

the location from ancient records of the site on which stood the first town meeting-house and the first public school.

April 11, 1894, the society celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Edward Everett, who was born in the old mansion on the corner of Boston and Pond Streets, at the "Five Corners." A public meeting was held in Winthrop Hall, at which delegations from the Board of Aldermen and Common Council took part in the services. An eloquent oration was delivered by Rev. James De Normandie, and addresses were made by Alderman Boardman Hall, Dr. Elbridge Smith, and others. Mr. James H. Stark gave a history of the Edward Everett mansion, which prior to the Revolution was occupied by Thomas Oliver, the last royal lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts. A finely illustrated volume was afterward published under the direction of Mr. William H. Whitmore, the President of the society, giving a full account of the proceedings. The one thing that the society stood in most need of since its existence was a building in which it could hold its meetings and store its archives and historic treasures. The meetings in the past had been held at the residence of its members; but it has now a headquarters which it can call its own, and that, too, in a historic location and building.

VALUABLE HOUSE SECURED.

The city purchased a lot of land to be used for greenhouse purposes on Massachusetts Avenue, near Five Corners, Dorchester. On this lot was situated one of the oldest Colonial houses in Dorchester, which was offered to the Historical Society, if they would remove the same. Mr. John H. Blake, Dr. Clarence J. Blake, descendants of the settler who built the house, and other members of the family, very generously offered \$1,000 towards the expense of moving and restoring it. Another \$1,000 was subscribed by members and others. The city allowed the building to be moved upon the triangular piece of land at the junction of Pond Street and the Parkway, at the



THE BLAKE HOUSE

Built by James Blake about 1650. Now Occupied by the Dorchester Historical Society

Five Corners, opposite the Edward Everett mansion. This land was given to the city a few years ago by the late Mr. Richardson, the owner of the Edward Everett house, and was the site of the first town-meeting house and first free school. The city also contributed another \$1,000 for grading and laying out the grounds surrounding the building.

The society intend to furnish and fit up the house in Colonial style. The furniture will be given by the descendants of the early Dorchester settlers, many of whom still reside in Dorchester, and who will avail themselves of this opportunity of preserving and handing down to future generations their family heirlooms. A portion of the building will be set off for a museum and library, which will contain relics of the Indians and early settlers of Dorchester and every work obtainable relating to the early history of the town.

The following history of the old Blake house was prepared and read by Mr. James H. Stark at a recent meeting of the society, and was greatly appreciated by the members:—

HISTORY OF THE BLAKE HOUSE AND FAMILY.

The ancient and respectable family of Blake is of British extraction, and traditionally descended from Aplake, whose name appears as one of the Knights of King Arthur's Table. Succeeding generations, however, seem to have paid little attention to the orthography of the name, so variously do we find it written.

ITS ETYMOLOGY.

In the first instance, by dropping the initial letter it was rendered P-Blake, and then, by compression, Plake, one entire word, both of which alike produce a sound and utterance uncouth and unharmonious. It was corrupted into Blague, to the confusion of all etymological explanation, had it so continued, but chance or design applied a remedy by substituting

Blaake, and ultimately Blake, which latter reading took place many centuries back, and has continued invariably the same from that period.

In a "Genealogical History of William Blake of Dorchester," published in 1857, appears the statement that the emigrant to New England was the son of Giles Blake, of Little Baddow, Essex, and the record of several generations of the family is given. The substance of this record is trustworthy as being a copy from "Morant's History of Essex," but the statement that the Dorchester settler was of this family was unwarranted by any evidence. Subsequently the late H. G. Somerby, Esq., by request of Stanton Blake, Esq., made extended researches in England to determine the origin of the American family. He finally located it at Over Stowey, Somerset, and the results of his investigations were published in 1881 by W. H. Whitmore, Esq., in "A Record of the Blakes of Somersetshire."

A BLAKE IN 1594.

The evidences upon which Mr. Somerby based his conclusions were: first, the record of a baptism in 1594, at Over Stowey, of a William Blake (son of Robert and grandson of John), the date corresponding to the age of the emigrant at death; and, second, the fact that a sister of this William, in her will of date 1647, mentioned a "brother in New England," no name, however, being given. While this evidence was not all that could be desired, it was generally accepted as correct, and the pedigree has been copied in several other genealogical publications.

In 1881 Rev. Charles M. Blake, U.S.A., while visiting in England, was shown by William Blake, Esq., of South Pether-ton, a genealogical chart of the "Blakes of Somersetshire," prepared by William Arthur Jones, Esq., A.M.

An examination of this chart led Mr. Blake to visit Pitminster, four miles from Taunton, where he found upon the parish registers sufficient evidence to convince him that this was the

early home of his ancestor, William Blake, but he was unable at that time to give the matter further attention.

THE GENEALOGY.

Recently investigations have been made by Francis E. Blake, through correspondence with the vicar of the parish and with Edward J. Blake, Esq., of Crewkerne. The latter himself examined the registers of Pitminster and Over Stowey, and he has had a careful examination made of wills and other original sources of information for the purpose of determining his own line of descent and verifying the chart referred to. The result of these researches, so far as relates to the American family, were very courteously copied for Francis E. Blake, and forms the basis of Blake genealogy.

The following records relating to this branch of the family appear upon the parish register at Pitminster:—

Anno Domini

- 1588. Grace Blake, daughter of Willm Blake, was baptized the 9th day of February.
- 1592. Eme Blake, daughter of William Blake, was baptized the third day of December.
- 1594. William Blake, son of William Blake, was baptized the 10th day of July.
- 1597. John Blake, son of William Blake, was baptized the fifteenth day of June.
- 1600. Ane Blaak, daughter of William Blaak, was baptized the sixteenth day of October.
- 1603. Richard Blaak, son of William Blaak, was baptized the seventeenth day of April.
- 1617. William Blake was married to Agnis Bond, widow, the 27th day of September.
- 1618. John Blake, sonne of William Blake, and Ann Blake, daughter of William Blake, were baptised the day of August.
- 1620. William Blake, sonne of William Blake, was baptised the 6th of September.
- 1624. James Blake, sonne of William Blake, was baptised 27th April.

With this record from Pitminster before us, there cannot be a shadow of doubt that we have here the family of William of Dorchester. We know that he had a wife Agnes and children John, Ann, William, and James, and, to make the case still stronger, the age of the father at death, and also of three of the children, Ann, William, and James, corresponds with the date of the baptism at Pitminster.

No record has been found of the baptism of Edward, another son of William and Agnes, but it is supposed that he was born in England, as there is no evidence of the father being in this country previous to the year 1636, the statement that he came in the "Mary and John" in 1630 being without foundation.

VERY BLUE BLOOD.

Following the notes of Mr. Somerby, with the substitution of William¹⁰ for Robert¹⁰, the line of descent will stand as follows: Robert¹, Henry², William³, Henry⁴, Robert⁵, William⁶, William⁷, Humphrey⁸ (great-grandfather of the admiral), John⁹, William¹⁰, William¹¹, of Dorchester.

Or, to state the matter more simply, the emigrant is now traced as being the grandson of John Blake of Over Stowey, through his son William, instead of being so deduced through his son Robert. But all the pedigree anterior to the grandfather John is not affected by this correction.

James Blake married Elizabeth Clap. She was the daughter of Deacon Edward Clap of Dorchester, born about 1634, and died Jan. 16, 1693-94, in the sixty-first year of her age. He was the second son of William Agnes Blake, born 1624 in England, and died in Dorchester Jan. 28, 1700, aged seventy-seven years. He was much in public business, as the records of Dorchester prove. From 1658 to 1685 we find him in some office almost every year; was a selectman thirteen years, rater, constable, deputy to General Court, clerk of the writs, recorder, sergeant in the military company, which was then an office of honor, and was chosen deacon of the church, and or-

dained to that office Jan. 30, 1672. He served as deacon about fourteen years, and was then chosen ruling elder, and served about the same length of time, until his death, both making twenty-eight years wanting two days. Tradition says, and after the most careful examination of old documents I think there is no doubt of it, that he built the house (lately owned and occupied by Mrs. Jane Williams, in the north part of Dorchester, west from Captain William Clap's tanyard, and north of Mr. Pettee's house, back from the street), and owned a farm adjoining. The house was doubtless built previous to 1650. A photograph of it has been taken as it now appears, and is here presented. I have no doubt that this is the property described in his will, where he says, "I give and bequeath to my son, John Blake, and his heirs, my dwelling house, barns, orchard, yard, garden and ten acres of land adjoining, more or less, it being partly upland and partly meadow," valued at £400. The house is referred to in the Dorchester town records, page 209. When "at a general meeting of the town the 6 (10) 1669, it was put to the vote" to build a house for the ministry. "To be such a house as James Blak's house is, namly 38 foote in lenth and 20 footewid and 14 foote betweene Joynts gert worke. The Vote was in the Affirmative." It is evident that this is the same house, as it corresponds to the above measurements.

FARMER, BUT A PENMAN.

This estate was retained in the Blake family till the year 1825. The bequest to his son Joseph of one 20-acre lot (more or less), "bounded on the one side with the land late of Samuel and Increase Sumner, and on the other side with the land of Captain Clap," must have been in this locality. He was probably a farmer, but his time must have been taken up with other objects. In addition to the time spent in municipal and church affairs, he was frequently engaged in settling estates, as overseer of the will of some friend or neighbor, or guardian of orphan children, in writing deeds and other instruments, etc. I will

mention here, by the way, that he was a most beautiful penman. But few of the present day can exhibit chirography that will compare favorably with his which is now extant.

It appears that he had a peculiar character, such as sound judgment and discretion, a faculty for leading others in important undertakings, and especially strong faith in his "glorious God & Redeemer," as he expressed it in his last will and testament.

JOHN BLAKE, 1657.

John Blake, who thus became the second owner of the property, was born March 16, 1657. We know but very little of his life, except that he was a deacon of the church, as his father had been before him. In our search through the last wills and testaments of the forefathers of the State we are apt to learn more about their deaths than their lives. The will is the final summing up of life's work. It is a record of the children then living; for in nearly all cases the children are all mentioned. It tells the story of a man's prosperity. It records the increase of the ten talents or the single one. Taken all together, wills are, perhaps, the most valuable adjuncts to family history that can be obtained.

John Blake, however, left no will; and, as he was but sixty years of age when he died, March 2, 1718, it may have been that death overtook him suddenly. His widow, Hannah, was appointed to administer the estate. The dwelling-house was valued at £50, and two barns at £20. We found an agreement on the Suffolk probate records concerning the settling of the estate, in which it states that, whereas the said Deacon John Blake died intestate, yet not without declaring what his will and pleasure was as to the settling of his estate after his decease, which was as follows:—

THE WILL.

"His mind was that his two daughters, Hannah and Elizabeth, should have a convenient Room in the House so long as

they or either of them should Remain unmarried and no longer, and that they should not have the liberty of letting or in any manner to convey their Rights therein to any other person."

This agreement was dated Nov. 29, 1719.

His two sons, John and Josiah, inherited the estate jointly. Josiah, who was a weaver, died first in 1748. The inventory of his estate contains "his part of a Dwelling House and the Shop adjoining thereto, and one-half of Barn and ye one half of about 15 acres of land and Meadow adjoining thereto in Old Town, Bills of credit ye sum of £700." Among the funeral charges was cash paid to James Foster for gravestones, £7. (These stones were obtained from the old State quarry on the Foster estate in South Boston.) The real estate passed to his brother John. Josiah Blake probably died childless.

A "CORDWAINER."

John Blake was a cordwainer, or shoemaker, as we should say now. He died about the first of the year 1773, leaving no will. The inventory, filed Jan. 15, 1773, included one-half of a barn and the hay, half a dwelling-house and 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres upland and meadow, all valued at £156 9s. 4d. We are unable to tell who owned the other half of the house, or, if, as seemed probable, John Blake owned it all, why it was not included in the list of his possessions. When the estate was divided, his son Samuel received the "westerly part of the dwelling house, called the kitchen end, and also one-third part of the cellar." The three daughters, Elizabeth, Hannah, and Rachel, who seem to have been all unmarried at the time, were given the remainder of the house and cellar and half of the barn.

The eldest son John reserved the customary double portion of the estate, but no part of the house.

IN THIS CENTURY.

Samuel died in 1781, and the inventory of his property does not mention the house, from which we judge that he made over

his share to his sisters. At all events, when the house was sold in 1825 to Caleb Williams, it was occupied by Miss Rachel Blake, the youngest daughter of John.

Caleb Williams died in 1842, and left the house and land to his widow Jane and two minor children. The interest of the minors was bought by their guardian, Jane, through a third party, in 1847.

Jane Williams left the property to her son, Josiah F. Williams, in 1891. He sold same to Antonia Quinser in 1892. Quinser sold the estate to the city of Boston.

The old house stood on historic ground, and in the midst of several other landmarks and memorials of old Dorchester. Old Dorchester burying-ground, where so many noted persons lie, is almost in sight. The home of Lieutenant-Governor Oliver, the birthplace of Edward Everett, was close by, and in front of it on Richardson Park, near the site where the first town-meeting was held in the United States, and where the first free public school was established, is the spot on which the old Blake house is now placed, and where we hope it will remain for centuries to come.

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